



ACE Centers Newsletter

ACCESS~COLLABORATION~EQUITY — BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

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The purpose of the ACE Center program is to increase student achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards and family involvement in their children's education with the provision of staff-supported "off-hour" access to additional educational opportunities through technology.

What is an ACE Center?

An ACE Center is a technology program that was made possible by a grant from the New Jersey Office of Educational Technology to provide technology resources in public locations such as libraries, community centers, housing complexes or in school-based locations with extended hours. The purpose of the ACE Center program is to increase student achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards and family involvement in their children's education with the provision of staff-supported "off-hour" access to additional educational opportunities through technology.



Community Technology ACE Center in Atlantic City, New Jersey

Called the ACE Centers, these centers provide an extension of a district's educational program for students, their families, and resources that support participation in educational activities. Local projects funded through the ACE grant program develop and deliver programs that help to close the "digital divide" between those who have access to technology and those who do not.

The intent of the ACE program is being

accomplished by the following:

- Providing students and their families with access to information and resources that will further instructional and educational technology programs;
- Collaborating to develop innovative instructional programs for student achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards;
- Providing the opportunity to increase student time-on-task for academic activities and achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards;
- Increasing family interest and involvement in school-based activities and instruction while providing a meaningful family experience;
- Developing and increasing technology skills for students, their families and community members; and
- Promoting equity among all members of the school community by offering the opportunity to increase their availability to technology.



Burlington City ACE Center Mobile Classroom

ACE Centers in New Jersey

By Natasha Gaujean-La Mar



Edith Crews, Coordinator of the Salem City Housing Authority, came to the ACE Center to learn to operate a digital camera

These centers are the result of a grant program to bridge the digital divide. Several sources have cited that, although schools have made great strides toward access within their boundaries, many students lag behind others in the opportunity for access outside of the normal school day.

- Where can you go to find a center providing students and their families with **ACCESS** to information and resources that will further instructional and educational technology programs?
- Where can you go to find partners in **COLLABORATION** with the goal of increasing family and community involvement in a center for the purpose of forming stronger ties between the school and home?
- Where can you go to find **EQUITY** to redefine the distribution of educational resources that improve academic achievement for all learners, at all levels, in all locations?

In the state of New Jersey, you can find all of this at the **Access-Collaboration-Equity (ACE)** Centers. Through the New Jersey Department of Education, the ACE Centers are intended to offer an extension of a school district's educational program for students, their families and the community who do not have access, when school is not in session, to technology resources that support participation in educational activities. These centers are the result of a grant program to bridge the digital divide.

Several sources have cited that, although schools have made great strides toward access within their boundaries, many students lag behind others in the opportunity for access outside of the normal school day. The digital divide - a gap between those who have access to computers and the Internet and those who do not - does indeed exist. According to a study on the digital divide by the Department of Commerce (www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/digitaldivide), students in households with larger incomes are more likely to use a home computer for schoolwork than students in poorer households. For example, only 20 per-

cent of students whose households earn less than \$30,000 a year are able to access and use a computer at home. However, 80 percent of students living in households that earn \$75,000 or more have technology access in their homes.

New Jersey has made great strides in providing students with equitable access to multimedia computers in the classroom. The current ratio for New Jersey students to multimedia computers is 5.3 to 1. Now New Jersey has made available several grant programs to assist technology in mitigating the differences in achievement related to disparities that lead to the digital divide.

About the ACE Grant Program

Thirty-nine ACE Centers are currently in operation administered by the New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology with funds totaling \$7.4 million. The funding sources for the Access-Collaboration-Equity (ACE) grant program is Title III, Goals 2000: Educate America Act, P.L. 103-227 Section 309 (CFDA #84.276) and Technol-



ogy Literacy Challenge Fund (CFDA# 84.318). The intent is to help students be successful in achieving the Core Curriculum Content Standards through an instructional activities available to students beyond the school day. Thus, students



Thirty-nine ACE Centers are currently in operation administered by the New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology

and their families have access to programs, resources, and services both on-site and online that they would not ordinarily have an opportunity to experience.

Although the funding is only provided for one year, ACE facilities are expected to continue to operate for a number of years through support from school district and/or community partnerships. The ACE centers are supervised, publicly accessible to students, their families and community members. They are all located in economically disadvantaged school districts and have extended hours (night, weekend, summers.)

Highlights of the ACE Program

In reaching their goals, the ACE Centers in New Jersey are doing many wonderful things for all people:

- At the City of Burlington Schools in Burlington County, the ACE Center is mobile. Students, adults and senior citizens can select a workshop tailored to meet their needs from the Light Byte Menu and attend sessions in the mobile classroom.
- At Millville Public Schools in Cumberland County, three ACE Centers have formed a triangle encompassing the neediest neighborhoods and offer year round, on a daily basis to the students and community members, formal and instructional programs and self-directed improvement activities.
- At the Orange School District in Essex County, three centers pair senior citizens with Orange High School students as Technology Buddies.

- At the Essex County Vocational Schools in Essex County, three satellite ACE Centers reach at-risk students through family participation in a structured educational experience and also operate a loaner program to make computers and printers available at home.

These centers are doing phenomenal work. They are breaking down the digital barrier and giving students and adults the opportunity to learn how technology enhances their lives.

Applying the Lesson: Hudson County, New Jersey

Take for example the Union City ACE Center in Hudson County. In one of the ACE Program classes, a project was created by both a teacher and the students. An introduction to computer application course was designed and offered for the parents of Union City School's students. On many occasions both parent and child attend class together. The goal is to expose the parent to the technology that their children are learning and utilizing on an everyday basis.

One after-school project involved letter writing skills and word processing. The teacher, Mr. Calise, asked the ACE Center participants to type a letter in order to practice their skills. He further stated

that he would mail the letters to reinforce and apply their work to everyday use. All twelve decided to write a letter to the mayor of the town. In their letter to Mayor Brian P. Stack of Union City, the students told him how happy they were with the ACE Center and how well they were doing. They further discussed different issues in their neighborhoods that concerned them.



Senior citizens learn computer skills at the Millville ACE Center

Upon receiving their letters, Mayor Stack sent each student a thank you note. In addition, he made time in his busy schedule to personally visit each participant at their homes and address their concerns. This is a wonderful example of how successful the ACE Centers are in providing technology resources and applying skills to daily application.

Calling the Community: Warren County, New Jersey

The ACE Center of the Phillipsburg School District in Warren County is located at the Phillipsburg Housing Authority Center. The center is equipped with 10 iMacs, 10 PCs and 2 laser printers in the community room. Students and their families now meet regularly with district staff to focus on activities that will help them achieve the Core Curriculum Content Standards. It's open after school and during the evening for drop-in and specialized classes. On Monday evenings fifth and sixth grade students run a program for the seniors citizens in the district. As Program Director Larry McKenna notes, "We need to bridge the void of those people in our community who need skills but who are still phobic of schooling. If we can attract parents, we can probably better attract their kids, and that will result in a win-win for our community."

During the summer the Phillipsburg ACE Center will run a Sim City Project. As part of this project, the kids will build an exact model of the town of Phillipsburg as it exists today. During the next phase of this project, the kids will spend time with members of the town government. They will learn how the town is run and how changes are made. Next they will program these changes into their models in an attempt to forecast the results of these changes. They also plan to simulate natural disasters on the model. During the final phase of the project, they will report their findings to the town government for their evaluation and comments.



A Golden Opportunity: Ocean County, New Jersey

For the ACE Center at the Lakewood School District in Ocean County, a center was established in the library of the Lakewood High School to provide access to computer labs and workshops at no cost to Lakewood families during weeknights and weekends.

The Lakewood ACE Center has had great success with their senior citizen component of the grant program called "Side By Side." An average of 10 seniors come into the ACE Center (Lakewood High School) everyday and get one-on-one computer tutoring for 45 minutes (one period of the school day) and then are able to visit a class of their choice. One of the coordinators of the program, Mrs. Toni Lee Ponti, has been very impressed with the overwhelming response. "It's great to watch our senior citizens reconnect with the world of education," Ponti said. "Learning never stops. There is a mutual respect for one another. The students love having the seniors citizens in their classes and enjoy the relationships they have fostered during computer tutoring. They have adopted each other so deeply that the students often remark on how much they miss the seniors citizens when they cannot come in."

One of the senior citizens, Mr. Peter Rosenberg, attends French class and receives computer training from a high school student, Parker Quass. "It's good to know that what I learn I can teach to others. I am helping him to understand a new technology and give him a friendlier view of the computer world," Quass said. Mr. Rosenberg says, "It's very good. The students are very eager and willing to listen to my questions and help find a solution," he said. With this winning combination, the ACE Center hopes to attract others in the Lakewood Community to participate, learn, and enjoy the technological opportunities made available through the ACE Center grant program.

Servicing the Community: Salem County, New Jersey

At Salem City School District in Salem County, two ACE Centers are established in school district facilities (one in the Salem Middle School and one at the Salem High School) with satellite center in two city housing projects. Edith Crews, Coordinator of the Salem City Housing Authority, came to the ACE Center to learn to operate a digital camera. Teaching her the use of a Sony Mavica digital camera was the Salem City School District's technology facilitator, John Simons. The camera is part of the equipment being given to the housing authority through the ACE grant funding.

Each of the housing authority community centers has received six computers each, along with two cameras. They are currently being used in the community rooms at the two housing projects. Computer training for housing authority staffers is now being conducted in an ACE grant computer lab set up in the Salem Middle School.

Ms. Crews took the camera class so she can teach others in the housing projects. She learned the various parts of the camera, how to program it, and how to record still pictures on floppy disks.

The housing authority will be using the equipment to take pictures at housing programs and on field trips for youngsters. In the future, it will also be used to take pictures for a planned housing authority newsletter that will be generated on the new ACE Center grant computers.

Another activity at Salem City ACE Center is providing Internet access for young people in the Salem City Lighthouse Youth Ministry. Every Friday evening, a group of youngsters led by five adults use the ACE computers in the Salem Middle School to broaden their knowledge in education both through age appropriate secular educational web sites as well as through Christian and Youth Ministry web sites. The school district's technology facilitator is helping the ministry to find appropriate material.

Just the Beginning

For the students who had no access to computers in their homes, for the parents who were computer-illiterate and feared appearing unintelligent in front of their kids, for the adults who just needed the opportunity to improve their skills or look for a job on the Inter-

net and for the senior citizens who just wanted to continue learning, the ACE Centers in New Jersey are the answer.

The focus of the ACE Centers is to ensure that all students have a fair opportunity to learn, improve teaching and learning, and generate, maintain and strengthen parent and community involvement, New Jersey is moving quickly toward bridging the digital divide.

ACCESS breaks down barriers to technology by allowing individuals to have physical access to educational technologies. COLLABORATION broadens the scope of the program so that most interests and needs are addressed. EQUITY occurs when the individual challenges of learners are taken into account.

The New Jersey Department of Education's vision is that all students, will be able to achieve the Core Curriculum Content Standards because they will have unlimited access to people, to the vast array of curriculum and instruction offered in the state, and to information and ideas, no matter where they exist. It is evident the unlimited access stated in the vision includes access beyond the school day - and the Access-Collaboration-Equity Centers are helping to achieve that vision. For New Jersey, this is just the beginning.



"I have been able to refine my skills in Microsoft Office while working at the ACE Center as an instructional assistant. I think this opportunity will help me decide what I might want to pursue as a career, whether in teaching or web design."

Joanna Medeiros - Student at Bloomfield Technical School of Essex County Vocational-Technical Schools in Essex County, New Jersey

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Check out the web sites!

Buena Regional ACE Center— www.acebuena.net/
 Dover ACE Center— www.dover-nj.net/acegrant.shtm
 Oceanside Charter ACE Center— www.oceansidecharter.com/The%20ACE%20Center.htm
 Orange ACE Center— www.orange.k12.nj.us/ace/index.htm
 Salem City ACE Center— www.salemnj.org/
 Trenton ACE Center— trentonace.tripod.com/
 West New York ACE Center— acecenters.wnyschools.net
 Glassboro ACE Center— www.glassboro.k12.nj.us/GHS/ACE%20lab.htm
 Palisades Park ACE Center— www.palpk.k12.nj.us/ACEII/acehmpg.htm
 Keansburg ACE Center— www.keansburg.k12.nj.us/pmr or www.keansburg.k12.nj.us/jrb
 Millville ACE Center— www.millville.org/ACE.
 New Jersey Department of Education— www.state.nj.us/education